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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000501

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: BAGHDAD ZOO -- RESPITE FROM THE URBAN JUNGLE

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Greg D'Elia for reasons 1.4 ( b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Baghdad Zoo has reportedly become the most popular destination for family outings in Baghdad. Attendance increased dramatically. RAPID RISE IN NUMBER OF VISITORS TO THE ZOO
2. (C) Baghdad Zoo Director Adel Salman Mousa (strictly protect) estimated February 11 that the Zoo now welcomes approximately 8,000 visitors. BUT MOST VISITORS LIVE IN DISTRICTS NEAR THE ZOO
3. (C) The Baghdad Zoo feels secure to Iraqi visitors, Ameen explained, in large part due to its proximity to the international zone. It is located in the international zone.
4. (C) Despite its reputation as a secure destination for families, Ameen explained, the Zoo does not attract visitors from all of Baghdad province.
5. (C) Ameen noted that 9 Nissan district boasts Baghdad's second most popular public commons, Kanat Museum and Park. Kanat mainly serves visitors. EID DELIGHT -- "BIGGEST CROWDS EVER" AT ZAWRA PARK
6. (C) None of Baghdad's public spaces, however, attract as many visitors as the Zoo and Zawra Park, according to Zoo administrators and post-visit reports. FAMILIES AND COUPLES, BUT NO SCHOOL TRIPS
7. (C) Mostly families with young children and couples currently visit the Baghdad Zoo, Mousa and Ameen said. Small organized trips also come.
8. (C) Ameen also noted that, before 2003, almost every school in Baghdad province scheduled an annual trip to the Zoo. No school trips have come since 2003. GIVING SADDAM'S EXOTIC ANIMALS BACK TO THE PEOPLE
9. (C) Ameen said that the Baghdad Zoo staff took particular pleasure in reclaiming for the Iraqi public the exotic animals formerly possessed by Saddam's regime. ZOO HIGHLIGHTS AND LOWLIGHTS
10. (C) The Baghdad Zoo also featured some primitive practices, including the daily slaughter of two donkeys to feed the lions, and some modern practices. IMPROVEMENTS TO THE ZOO ON-GOING
11. (C) The Baghdad Amanat has invested in renovation projects, including reconstruction of a restaurant inside the Zoo. Other visible Amanat projects include the renovation of the Zoo's entrance.
12. (C) To help address these deficiencies, ITAO officers have worked to facilitate a training trip for some of the Zoo's veterinarians to the Crocker Zoo in Atlanta.